

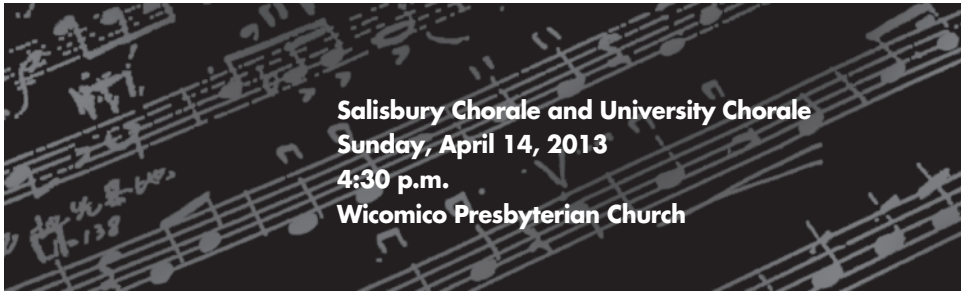
Salisbury Choral and University Choral
Sunday, April 14, 2013
4:30 p.m.
Wicomico Presbyterian Church

Program Notes

Spring is a time for renewal, new life and love. Each of this afternoon's musical selections uniquely express love through diverse texts and musical form. The "Opening Chorus of the Villagers," from the comic opera *The Bartered Bride* by Bedřich Smetana, sings of a time ripe for mating, when every lad would be a lover and maidens dream of ringtime while circling around the Maypole. Amidst all the frolicking, a warning is acclaimed, admonishing folks to pause before they marry, wary of unsuspected pitfalls, court disasters, love luring and then deceiving. Throughout the courting narrative, we hear a Polka-style dance as the peasants celebrate the village saint's day. This opening number sets the tone for the plot's central conceit of an unwelcomed arranged marriage of Mařenka to the son of the wealthy Micha. The future bride refuses to marry because she is in love with Jenik, a son from a poor unknown family.

Smetana is considered the father of Czech opera because his operas were the first to remain in the Czech repertory, a tradition continuing to the present day. Popular dance rhythms from genuine Czech folk music permeate Smetana's music. Featured dances in *The Bartered Bride* include the *skočná* and the *furiant*. A fast 2/4 pulse with accented stressed beats and polka-like rhythmic figures are prevalent in the opening chorus and throughout Smetana's operas.

The *Missa brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo*, composed in 1775, is one of 14 masses composed by Franz Joseph Haydn. This concise mass expressing the love of God is a practical setting for worship or for the concert stage. Haydn composed the *Missa brevis* for the Order of the Brothers of Mercy (Barmherzige Brüder) Convent in Eisenstadt, with a dedication to the patron St. John of God (Joannis Cuidad, 1495-1565). All six movements of the Ordinary of the Mass are set in the key of B-flat. One possible reason for this is that Haydn chooses B-flat as the highest note for sopranos. Unique to the *Missa brevis* are the shortened Gloria and Credo movements with telescoping text, or text compression, where each voice part sings a different line of text simultaneously. The most doctrinally important texts are set chordally with all voice parts singing the same words. In the original setting performed today, Haydn omits the intonation line of the Gloria; and, certain words in the Credo are also missing, not for any religious reasons, but perhaps because of the composer's forgetfulness. The *Benedictus* is the most elaborate setting in the mass, scored for soprano solo and an obbligato organ part, inspiring the title 'Little Organ Mass.' The original instrumental scoring is for two violins and continuo in the "Vienna church trio" tradition common in south Germany and Austria in the mid-18th century. For the first performance at the Convent Chapel of Brother of Mercy in Eisenstadt, Haydn conducted from the organ with four singers, two violinists, cello and double bass.



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Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800-1875) begins his two-volume collection of international poetry translated into German with a quote from Aristophanes:

The common people have no love for difficult poets, nor for wine from Pramnos; they cause the eyes to squint and the stomach to cramp. They love the fragrant, the mild, and that which is sweet as nectar.

The expression above summarizes Daumer's philosophy of "collection quality of directness, simplicity and universal appeal" referencing his *Polydora: ein Welt poetisches Liederbuch* (Polydora: a World-Poetic Songbook). Volume two is a compilation of translated poems from Russia, Poland, Sicily, Spain, Serbia, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania. Biographer Max Kalbeck thinks Johannes Brahms, already familiar with Hafis/Daumer poetry, found these texts in a used-book store. Brahms was attracted to these poems because of their "virtues of terseness and focus on a single idea – what poets would call an 'epigrammatic' character." We can only guess what stimulated Brahms to set these poems as waltzes. Kalbeck suggests the composer's experience with the Waltzes, op. 39 Hungarian Dances (1852-1869) or the graceful Austrian Ländler of Schubert influenced his decision. From our modern musical theatre perspective the waltz is usually equated with love, the thematic thread of many of the poems.

Brahms most assuredly was inspired by the Russian-Polish and Hungarian dances: those of the Cossacks called Schäume[r] [frothies], Brauselieder [bubbly songs], or Tanzbrauser [dance-bubbles]. Although Brahms wrote the melodies, each of the aforementioned folk dances had their own words and melodies sung by Polish peasants. Since 12 of the 18 poems are dances, this becomes another unifying factor for the collection. The music is closely wedded to the text through tone-painting manifested in the two-part structure of the poetry; the first part stating an image from nature and the second part adding a social element. For example, in Nr. 2 *Am Gesteine rauscht die Flut*, the opening phrase: "Upon the rocks the high tide breaks, hurled by a mighty force" is set to an agitated, syncopated melody and accompaniment. This is answered by "The one who knows not how to sigh learns it by loving" set to a homophonic, broader vocal part underscored by a slightly less agitated piano part. Kalbeck writes that Brahms considered Daumer's collection a treasure, and that the composer "knew how to kindle the hidden spark of genius into a bright flame, and he felt himself most deeply indebted to the poet." Brahms, upon meeting the aged poet, was surprised to find out that Daumer was unaware of Brahms and his settings of the poems; this is ironic since Daumer would owe his literary immortality to Brahms' *Liebeslieder Waltzer*.

– William M. Folger



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